Fatherhood and immigration: challenging the deficit theory

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ABSTRACT

Most immigration studies focus on the negative consequences of immigration for families and for parenting. Immigration is also viewed as a factor that undermines fathers' capacity to implement their fathering roles. The impact of immigration on fathers has received very little attention. This paper is based on 54 interviews with immigrant fathers to Canada and Israel. Based on qualitative data, the paper investigates immigrant fathers' perceptions of fatherhood in the midst of cultural change. This paper challenges the widely held notion that immigration itself is a risk factor for fatherhood. It focuses rather on the systemic barriers and obstacles facing immigrant fathers in their new country and the positive opportunities this change presents. Implications for intervention and policies concerning immigrant families are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Social services in multicultural societies often assist families in cultural transitions. These processes are seen as carrying potential risks and threats for families and children. Studies mostly look at immigration as a complex transition that affects the stability and continuity of family roles. This paper focuses on the impact of immigration on the role of fathers. Moving away both from the 'risk theory' of immigration and the 'deficit theory' of fatherhood this paper focuses rather on the systemic barriers and obstacles facing immigrant fathers in their new country and the positive opportunities this change represents for them and their families. The study examines the impact of immigration on immigrant fathers from different countries to Canada and Israel.

Fatherhood and immigration

Contemporary immigration is a global phenomenon changing the social ecology of entire societies (Massey 1995; Kandel & Massey 2002). The importance of the family in immigration is vital (Mincer 1978; Alvarez 1987; Rumbaut 1997). Many studies have found that the immigrants' primary motivation is to provide a better life for their children (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001). Families tend to cluster together in ethnic communities that remain family centred (Parrillo 1991). Families provide the security and emotional reliance to sustain immigrant endeavours in a new and potentially antagonistic culture. Compared with the relatively limited range of studies on children and women, the impact of immigration on fathers has received even less attention (Shimoni *et al*. 2000). Most immigration studies focus on the negative consequences of immigration for families and for parenting. For example, immigration is perceived predominantly in the literature as a source of stress and a risk factor for families and children (Berry *et al.* 1987; Espin 1992; Bourgois 1998; Roer-Strier 2001). It is also viewed as a factor that undermines a father's capacity to implement his fathering role (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001).

The classical immigration literature links risk factors with 'culture shock'. The multisourced stressors that the acculturation process in the host country imposes on families are associated with psychological and cultural crisis, deterioration of health, social difficulties, and emotional and physical burnout. Hernandez & McGoldrick (1999) claim that immigration initiates a process of extended change and adaptation in all domains of a parent's life. These changes include adjusting to a new home, social environment, language, culture, place of work, and profession. Often, economic, social and familial support systems are undermined. Under such circumstances, parents' physical and psychological health, self-image, ability to withstand stress and anxiety levels may all be challenged. Although many immigrant fathers are unemployed for some time – and are ostensibly more available to their children – the role change, lack of experience in certain parental functions, and crisis brought about by cultural change often impair their paternal functioning. Sluzki (1992) states that children's rapid integration and wives' early incorporation into the host labour force may represent a threat to fatherhood status and family stability. The decline in self-esteem due to unemployment, poverty, and loss of social status has been linked to higher rates of depression and sense of acute feelings of grief, loss, guilt, isolation and marginalization, increased alcohol intake, and a rise in punishing and neglectful behaviour towards children (Grinberg & Grinberg 1989; Gilan 1990; Robertson 1992; Skolnick & Skolnick 1992; Shimoni *et al*. 2003). Robertson (1992), Gilan (1990), Espin (1992) and others have documented the trauma induced by war and enforced refugee status with the incumbent feelings of uprootedness, loss, grief and depression. Nevertheless, compared with the range of studies on children and women, the impact of immigration on fathers has received very little attention. This lapse is still another manifestation of the general neglect that fatherhood research has suffered in the past.

Fatherhood: Three basic trends

The more recent body of fatherhood research can be organized according to three trends posing three fundamental questions that have captured the interest of researchers.

First trend: fathers' presence

Studies of fatherhood during the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily conducted in the USA, were concerned with the question: 'Where have fathers gone?' (Fein 1976; Gladieux 1978; Maccoby 1980, 1989; Biller 1981; Wells & Renkin 1991). Researchers examining this question were concerned with the impact of both the physical and emotional absence of fathers on the well-being of children (Biller 1974). The main conclusion of these studies was that 'father absence matters' for a great number of child and family variables (Amato & Keith 1991). Although these studies opened the door for a new agenda for fatherhood inquiry, they also generated a 'deficit theory of fatherhood' (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997), in which the weaknesses and shortcomings of fathers, rather than their contributions, were studied (Peters & Day 2000).

Furstenberg (1988) summarized much of the literature on father disengagement in suggesting that some fathers are pushed out of the family by geographical mobility and increased economic demands.

Second trend: fathers' involvement

A second trend in the literature addressed the question: 'What do fathers actually do?' (McKee & O'Brien 1982); more specifically, researchers sought to define the dimensions of father involvement (Pleck *et al.* 1986; Pleck 1987; Furstenberg 1988; Radin 1994; Gadsden & Hall 1996). Using a developmental perspective, fatherhood began to be understood as an enriching process related to the expressional and affective capacities of men (Russell 1982; Lamb 1998). Pleck (1987) pointed out changing perceptions of fathers' roles throughout US history: from the moral teacher to the breadwinner, gender role model, and nurturer. Lamb (1986) described four central fathering roles in Western societies: breadwinning, supporting mothers in their role, being directly involved in household tasks, and interacting with children. Moving beyond the notion of 'absent fathers', this research trend focused on the positive effects of fatherhood on children's development and on fathers' development. The novel type of father anticipated by this literature was the nurturing father. However, the data collected in several studies suggest that this anticipation was premature (Lupri 1991; Decoste 1994).

Later studies adopted a more balanced stance that integrated the dichotomist view of fatherhood (Furstenberg 1995) by shifting the focus from 'biological fatherhood' to 'social fatherhood' and child–father relationships (Day 1998). Many efforts sought to define indicators of 'responsible' fathering and criteria to assess father involvement. The primary contribu-

tions of these studies was to shift the course of fatherhood research towards an understanding of a more integrated and balanced view of the father's role. This array of studies helped to paint paternal involvement as a multifaceted picture – as a complex variable that can be understood in a multitude of ways, as neither always statistically measurable, nor universally definable (Palkovitz 1997).

Third trend: meaning of fatherhood

A third trend addressed the question of 'What does fatherhood mean?' (LaRossa 1997; Lupton & Barclay 1997). These studies shed light on the cultural, economic, and socio-psychological aspects of fatherhood. Among the studies focusing on the cultural influence on fatherhood, some reviewed changes in cultural perceptions and ideologies (Tripp-Reimer & Wilson 1991). Others were based on symbolic analysis and expanded the notion of fatherhood as a cultural construction. These studies made a critical contribution to the understanding of fatherhood from a historical and cultural perspective.

The bi-national Israeli-Canadian study described in this paper addressed all three areas of fatherhood research. First, it explored fathers' presence in their children's lives following the immigration processes. Second, it examined patterns of immigrant fathers' role and involvement. Lastly, it looked at the ways in which fatherhood was reconstructed during cultural transition.

METHODS

Greenfield (1994) called for a methodological paradigm for studying minority and immigrant families based on methods of data collection that aim to study participants' perceptions and attributions of meaning to the studied phenomena. She emphasizes the importance of investigating the multiple perspectives of immigrants. Following Greenfield's suggestions, focus group and in-depth interviews were chosen as the primary source of data collection for this study; these methods were deemed to be most likely to provide rich data exploring fatherhood during cultural change from the participants' perspectives.

This study was a comparative, bi-national Israeli-Canadian study in which researchers from both countries formulated similar research questions and criteria for the selection of participants. Both Israeli and Canadian research teams included principal investigators, and first-language interviewers from the populations studied.

This paper presents the results based on interviews with the fathers in Canada and Israel. The paper focuses on fathers' presence, parental involvement, the impact of immigration on the cultural construction of fatherhood, and the barriers and opportunities to responsible fathering linked to the immigration process.

The context: Canada and Israel as migratory countries

According to several writers (Este 1999; Abu-Laban & Gabriel 2002; Li 2002), Canada can be perceived as an immigrant nation. Since Confederation in 1867, a number of salient factors have shaped and influenced Canadian immigration policy: the national and racial origins of prospective immigrants; the need for labour to fulfil specific job markets; the availability of relatives in Canada to act as official sponsors; internal economic growth, recession, or depression; international conditions affecting the number of people worldwide seeking to escape poverty, natural disaster, war, or political unrest and the number of countries willing to accept them; and the impact on both French and English communities in the nation (Christensen 1995).

Before the 1970s, the majority of immigrants came from Western Europe, Great Britain, and the United States. Changes to the Immigration Act during the 1970s resulted in an increasing number of immigrants coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The amended immigration Act of 1976 clearly identified three classes of immigrants (family class, refugees, and independent immigrants) as those that would be admitted to Canada rather than basing the selection of immigrants on race, nationality, or country of origin. Family class provides for individuals with family members living in Canada to join their family; independent class immigrants are those who are assessed on the point system; and refugees are individuals who fear for their lives or well-being and are allowed to enter Canada above the usual immigrant quota.

Over the last 15 years, Canadian immigration policy has centred on the need to attract individuals with skills and fiscal resources that will make an immediate impact from an economic perspective. In recent years, the emphasis on recruiting immigrants with job flexibility, entrepreneurial skills, and investment portfolios appears to be a high priority (Fleras & Elliot 2003). It is maintained that by attracting newcomers

who fit this profile, Canada will be able to compete in the era of globalization (Li 2002).

Immigration from the former Yugoslavia increased during the early 1990s as a result of the civil strife that was occurring in Yugoslavia. The majority settled in Toronto, Quebec (Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières), and Calgary. The majority of these individuals were university educated or were highly skilled tradespersons. However, like other groups of newcomers, they encountered difficulties in gaining employment that was commensurate with their training (Bauder & Cameron 2002).

Although the Chinese have been in Canada since the mid-1860s, it was not until the 1960s that there was considerable growth in numbers due to the more liberal immigration policies. The 1990s provided for a much larger increase stimulated by both the return of Hong Kong to China and the creation of an investor class within business by Immigration Canada in 1985. The Chinese population accounts for the largest visible minority in Canada with the majority based in Toronto and Vancouver (Budhu 2001). From 1998 to 2002, mainland China was the second leading country of birth for immigrants in Calgary (City of Calgary, 2003).

The majority of Latin American immigration to Canada has occurred since 1980. It was the result of the push–pull theory that evolved cyclically as the events of the country of origin forced immigrants and refugees out. Darden & Kamel (2000) maintain that the combination of the following factors served as the major reasons for the influx of Latin Americans:

> It occurred due to oppressive dictatorships, state terror, civil war, or violence in the home country. They were refugees fleeing American-backed military governments and felt they would not be officially welcomed in the United States. Other Latin Americans came to Canada not as refugees but as skilled professionals from countries with limited prospects for economic advancement. (p. 249)

In 2002, newcomers from Central and South America represented approximately 4.5% of the number of immigrants in Calgary. Immigrants and refugees from Colombia represent an emerging community in Calgary (City of Calgary 2002).

Significant demographic changes have occurred within the South Asian community in Canada since their arrival in the early 1900s. Their immigration occurred in three distinct stages. The first, during the period 1903–1920, were predominantly males who came mostly from the Punjab area to British Columbia. The second phase of the 1960s brought skilled and semiskilled immigrants from Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and the Caribbean, where their ancestors settled and where their families have lived for generations. The 1980s was the third phase, which brought large groups of Tamils from Sri Lanka. Today, the South Asian community represents the second largest visible minority group in Canada (Budhu 2001).

Israeli society has been galvanized by a constant influx of immigrants from Jewish communities dispersed throughout the world. This migratory character embodies a central theme in the Israeli national ethos, that of the re-unification of the Jewish nation. This ethos is reflected in a proactive endeavour to attract Jewish immigration to Israel (Leshem 2003). Almost 40% of the actual Jewish population was born abroad. In its 57 years of independence, Israel has absorbed more than 50% of its population through immigration. The rate of immigrants to habitants is much higher in Israel than in the USA or Canada. Immigration to Israel was built on 'waves', migratory movements coming from a common demographic origin. Two current 'waves' are the Former Soviet Union (FSU or Russian) and the Ethiopian immigrations. The current Russian immigration started in 1989 and brought to Israel a million immigrants representing more than a fifth of the total population. This mass of immigrants joined the existing FSU immigrant community which had arrived in the early 1970s (Horowitz 1989). The underlying motivational background for this migration relates to contextual factors in FSU, namely a decay of economic, political, and social conditions juxtaposed with a desire to live in a Jewish society (Al-Haj & Leshem 2000). Many families moved to Israel in search of a better future for their offspring. The main part of this immigration is secular, mostly composed of nuclear and small families. In general, this immigration holds a sense of accomplishment with regard to the objectives of their migratory adventure and a considerable degree of satisfaction with their new situation (Al-Haj & Leshem 2000). Nevertheless, studies reported high levels of psychological stress connected with questions of employment and social adjustment (Baider *et al.* 1996). Basically, the Russian immigrant was found to have a basic trust in his family and a deep distrust towards Israeli institutions and services (Al-Haj & Leshem 2000).

The Ethiopian immigration to Israel essentially materialized in two 'waves' taking place in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively, comprising almost 80 000 people. The motives for this migration are structurally

similar to the parallel migration from the former Soviet Union, namely acute economic distress, unsteady political situation, and an adjacent wish to live in a Jewish society. The immigration to Israel inflicted dramatic transformations upon the traditional mostly rural, religious, and numerous Ethiopian Jewish families.

Lacking the 'appropriate' Western cultural codes required for integration to the new society, and exposed to both overt and covert manifestations of racism such as public questioning of the legitimacy of their Judaism, the Ethiopian community experienced a deep feeling of exclusion and despair (Ben-Ezer 1992; Ojanuga 1994). This situation has been worsened by the paternalistic approach of the integration system towards this community (Dolev-Gindelman 1989; Leshem 2003). The traumatic vicissitudes of the immigration, the shocking meeting with the new society, and an arousing sense of discrimination led the community to painful feelings of hopelessness and despair (Ben-David & Ben-Ari 1997). In this context the Ethiopian community experienced high levels of distress resulting in high suicide rate (Friedmann *et al.* 1990) triggered in an intense identity crisis (Weil 1995).

Despite the fact that these two migratory populations develop social ties within their own cultural boundaries, the two enjoy different levels of social and economical integration in the system, the FSU being more integrated and the Ethiopian segregated (Benita & Noam 1995; Ben-David & Biderman 1997; Lazin 1997; Bar-Yosef 2001).

The sample

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we chose sample selection techniques of purposeful sampling and snowballing (Stainback & Stainback 1988; Patton 1990) in order to obtain diverse perspectives on fathering.

Selection criteria

All participants were fathers of preschool children. Some were relatively new arrivals, while others were immigrants who had been in Canada and Israel longer (up to a period of 5 years in Canada and 7 years in Israel).

The average age of the fathers was 38 years for the Canadian study and 34 years for the Israeli study, with both younger (in their early twenties, youngest father 21) and older fathers (in their late forties, oldest father was 49) represented in both groups. We attempted to include both employed and unemployed fathers. In Canada 41% had part-time employment, 12.5% were full-time employed, 4.15% combined part-time employment with studies, and the rest were unemployed (42.35%). In Israel, most fathers in the FSU group were employed, while 50% of the Ethiopian fathers were unemployed. These rates are proportional to the Canadian and Israeli national unemployment rates for the studied immigrant groups. In Canada the group composition of the sample of 24 immigrant fathers included: 6 Chinese (4 from the mainland, 1 from Hong Kong, 1 from Taiwan); 6 South American (1 from El Salvador, 4 from Colombia, 1 from Chile); 2 identified themselves as Yugoslavian and 2 as Bosnian; and 7 fathers were from Southeast Asia (3 from India, 1 from Nepal, and 3 from Pakistan). The data from Israel presented in this paper are based on interviews with 15 fathers who immigrated from FSU and 15 from Ethiopia.

Research questions

This paper is based on 54 interviews with immigrant fathers to Canada and Israel. Fathers were asked about their values, expectations, role definitions, and beliefs related to being a father, as well as the similarities and differences they perceived in fathering roles in Canada or Israel and their countries of origin. Fathers were also asked about the opportunities for and barriers to fathering in both countries as related to their immigration. Participants described their actual involvement in daily childcare responsibilities and their participation in intervention programmes for parents and families. Finally, they were asked to provide their own recommendations for designing successful programmes that promote the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

Interviews

The research team members conducted in-depth individual interviews in the fathers' native tongues to ensure that language would not be a barrier to self-expression by the participants. Interview questions were translated into all languages and were translated back into Hebrew or English by the research team members to guarantee that the questions were culturally sensitive. In both countries, the first-language interviewers translated the tapes by speaking onto another tape, in order to capture their ability to

express nuances in meaning, and then transcribed the tapes they had created.

Data analysis

The analysis consisted of identifying key themes that emerged from the data. Coding sheets were developed to enter the quotations on each theme made by fathers in the interview transcripts. Entries had transcript page references so that the authors could identify and refer back to the context in which the statement was uttered. After relevant sections of the interviews were entered onto coding sheets, each of the authors, along with the research coordinator, independently rated the frequencies (Creswell 1994). The team compared ratings and reached a consensus regarding differences. Attention was given to the metaphors (Bogdan & Biklen 1992), proverbs, and common images frequently used by participants (Miles & Huberman 1994).

FINDINGS

The findings will be presented according to five themes that emerged from the bi-national data: fathers' roles, fathers' involvement, the meaning of fatherhood (reassessment of meaning of fatherhood following immigration), opportunities for and barriers to fatherhood in the host culture, and recommendations for intervention programmes.

Fathers' roles

Our diverse sample of immigrant fathers in both countries shared deep expressions of commitment, concern, and responsibility when asked about their role as fathers. The fathers talked about taking responsibility for providing for their children, serving as a role model, guiding and teaching them, and preparing them for the future. To some, the commitment seemed overwhelming and somewhat stressful. To others, fatherhood was a source of tremendous pride and joy. For many, it was a mixture of both. The following quote from one of the Canadian South Asian participants captures these feelings:

> '. . .When I became a father, I realized that my family is complete and now I am head of the family . . . I feel proud that there is someone to carry my name forward. And then also I realized that there are responsibilities . . . towards taking care of providing food, shelter and better education. I sort of feel proud and happy that I am a father . . . but also I . . . have realized that I have . . . a lot of responsibilities to make them good, not only right now . . . but into the future and I have to try my best to make them good citizens . . .'

An Israeli FSU father describes the 'gigantic mission' of being a father:

> '. . . For me being a father is to claim much responsibility. I went a long way until I was ready to be a father. This is one of the most important decisions in a man's life. You can change a workplace, a wife, a country, but to bear a child this is something you can not change or ignore. You have to ask yourself if your economic situation gives you sufficient security. Are you sure you chose the right partner or the right country? And firstly you ask yourself if you want to take upon yourself such a gigantic mission.'

Some of the fathers described fatherhood using the word love – and that was included in a rich description of the passion and intimacy that a father feels for his child. Interestingly, the most emotional descriptions of fatherhood emerged in the interviews with the Chinese fathers – a group that is often perceived as less (publicly) expressive of emotions than all the other groups.

Without exception, when responding to the question about values and beliefs that guide their fathering, the participants shared beliefs about honesty, integrity, and respect for others. Respect for families emerged in almost all the interviews with a particular emphasis on respecting elders. This response was found in all the cultural groups but most consistently in the Ethiopian group in Israel and the South Asian group of fathers in Canada. Across all groups in this study, fathers expressed a desire for their children to grow up educated, financially secure, and having positive family relations.

The importance of education as a means to future success was the predominant theme amongst the Ethiopian and Chinese fathers. Both Ethiopian and Latin American fathers referred to the importance of their religion as maintaining family cohesion and values. In the words of a Canadian father from Latin America: 'Religion is a very important thing as a value to raise your family. Moral values are very important . . . and I want my son to be the same'.

All of the South Asian fathers in the study talked about their core values as something they received from their parents, their culture, and all expressed the wish that these cultural values be preserved:

> '(Here in Canada) I have to constantly . . . guide my children or explain to my children that our religion does not give permission for certain freedoms, which they see in this culture.' (South Asian father)

Fathers' involvement

The immigrant fathers in this study were engaged with their children as providers (when they could), guiders, and mediators between the two cultures, and through recreational interaction with their children. The fathers we interviewed reported that they play with their children, read to them, watch TV with their children and help them with their homework. They go for walks with their children and talk to them. A Latin American father said:

> 'Every evening I read to them before they go to sleep. I tell them stories or read to them. On weekends, we go outside to the park or playground. We go roller skating, bicycling, I try to answer all their questions and this is not always possible. I try to learn how they have spent their day. She likes to read . . . we sing and we dance. I ask my children about their activities at school . . . I also play with them.'

In response to the question of involvement Ethiopian fathers in Israel further reported that they take their children to the synagogue and conduct activities aimed at preserving the Ethiopian culture, cultural pride, and the Amharic language.

Fathers from Ethiopia and FSU also reported taking part in everyday activities such as bathing their children, changing nappies, and taking them to the kindergarten. Fathers felt that this was one of the roles of Israeli fathers.

The amount of time that fathers spent with their children was related to employment status. Interestingly, many of the immigrant fathers to Canada expressed their sense that Canadian fathers were less engaged with their children than they were and less than they should be.

> 'In general, Canadian fathers are more liberal. They give children a kind of freedom that the children cannot handle because of immaturity. As a result, the father loses control of the children and children do whatever they want . . . In my opinion, Canadian fathers do not give enough love and values to their children . . . they do not share time with their children . . .' (Latin American father)

A somewhat different observation on the host country's fathers was made by the Israeli immigrants of both groups. All immigrant fathers interviewed in Israel viewed Israeli fathers to be more involved in their children's lives than fathers in their countries of origin.

> '. . . Israeli fathers are much more emotionally involved with their children. Children are in the focus of attention, Israeli fathers carry their fatherhood like carrying a flag.' (FSU father)

According to another father from FSU: 'The Israeli father is a good hearted macho, a giant that plays'. Ethiopian fathers remarked on the expressive nature of the Israeli father: 'Israeli fathers are very physical, open in expressing their emotions and very involved in the school'.

However, in both groups reservations were expressed regarding the consequences of the observed involvement.

> 'I think that they lose their authority as parents and become the friends of their children and I do not approve of that. Israeli kids trust and love their parents but they see them as equals and, as a result, lack respect for them.' (FSU father)

Surprisingly, time was a gift that both Israel and Canada provided to some of the fathers. Several of the men, especially the Chinese fathers from Hong Kong in Canada and FSU fathers in Israel, maintained that immigration helped them to be able to spend more time interacting with their children:

> 'In Canada, I will be able to have more time to stay with the children whereas in Hong Kong I was not able to spend time with children as I was too busy with work. In Canada, the father seems to have more time to spend and stay with the children.' (Father from Hong Kong)

One of the Latin American fathers in Canada said:

> 'I have more time to share with my daughter and I feel more relaxed playing with her. In my home country, I worked long hours and the traffic jams made me feel stressed.'

And in Israel one FSU father said:

> 'Here in Israel people do not drink vodka, people work less, and there are weekends that are spent with family, in that it is similar to the USA. It is different than what we had in Russia. People did not have money and had to work on weekends or garden for their food. There was no time for leisure.'

Another interesting observation of a FSU father explained the time shared by parents and children as a response to change in family roles:

> 'Fathers in Russia spent less time with childcare. Grandparents provided most of the childcare. They were the main caregivers . . . In Israel grandparents are not expected to have this role. Parents raise children on their own and then, naturally, fathers are more involved.'

The meaning of fatherhood

Immigration presents fathers with an opportunity to reassess the meanings of fatherhood. Many fathers were preoccupied with their role in the cultural

transition of their children. While there were differences within each group of fathers, clear patterns emerged. For some of the South Asian fathers in Canada, to be a father in Canada means to preserve the culture of the former country:

> 'I guide my children according to how my parents took care of me . . . My expectation for my children as adults will be that they should be financially independent . . . and have good educational background, and they should have a good family life. They should respect their elders the way in our culture people do. Another thing is I want them to understand the religion . . . and for that I am training them also and hopefully they will follow what I expect them to do.' (South Asian father)

Some interesting differences emerged with respect to the centrality or importance of preserving elements from their previous country, when we considered the responses to questions about the guiding beliefs of fathers and their goals for their children. Both Ethiopian and FSU fathers expressed a great desire for their children to preserve the culture and traditions of the country of origin. Amongst the Chinese fathers, both from Hong Kong and from the mainland, there was very little or no mention of preserving former traditions or values. Fathers from the FSU group in Israel saw the fatherhood role as providing their children a bridge to their Russian culture while helping them to integrate new components of the host culture as well:

> 'I want my children to read books in Russian. Now I read to them and sing Russian songs. We see videos in Russian. I consciously do it for them to preserve my culture of origin. It is important for me to educate them using the same books I was raised. However, it is very important to me to be emotionally accessible to my child like Israeli fathers. I want my child to know that I am there for him even if I am not physically present. I want to be with him when he grows up. I want him to share all the questions and internal conflicts with me.' (FSU father)

For some fathers the new situation represents a serious challenge to their conceptions of fatherhood. Ethiopian fathers in Israel expressed great concern regarding the rapid assimilation of their children to Israeli society. Some of them experienced it as a loss of control and authority:

> 'My son reads and speaks Hebrew. He has social contacts. If he gets confused I don't have the wisdom to guide him. The teacher calls my boy and tells him to translate. The child takes advantage of my inability to write or read and translate other things, does not bring letters from the school. This causes much disrespect for the father. He loses his power.' (Ethiopian father)

Another Ethiopian father tells the following story:

> 'On Saturday we as Jews have to respect the Sabbath. One Saturday my son wanted to go out to ride his bicycle like many secular Israeli kids do. I told him not to. He started shouting. I took the bicycle. I told him not to leave home. He wanted to jump from the window and kept yelling. The neighbours called the police. The police talked to him. I tried to explain that I would not let him ride on the Sabbath, but they gave him the bicycle and went down. I expected the police to say: "This is your father and you have to respect him, to listen to him". I was devastated. What kind of a country is this?'

The Chinese fathers (both from the mainland and from Hong Kong) experienced the cultural change in a different way. Almost without exception, the immigration presented to them with an opportunity to enact a new dimension to their fatherhood. These fathers stressed how important it is for them to assist their children to be successful 'Canadians'.

Unlike the findings in the current and previous studies (Roer-Strier 2001) where *rapid assimilation* tended to relinquish parental authority to the authority figures in the host country, these Chinese fathers showed a fierce determination to learn the Canadian ways so that they could facilitate and foster the children's assimilation:

> 'Like I mentioned before, the legal system, the human rights, the lifestyle, all this contributed to the way I (am) taking the part as a father in Canada. I'm myself learning and also adjusting to the new way of living . . . I see my responsibility as a role model for my kids so even though I am not totally used to the new lifestyle . . . I am trying to adjust to the new way . . . (and am) taking care of the kids as a father as immigrant in Canada.'

Interestingly, one of the resources that this father cited as helping him to learn the 'Canadian way' was the local community Chinese newspaper. Another father from China expressed a similar stance:

> 'But in Canada, it is more emphasized for the child to have individual development . . . That is why now I am in Canada I know I have to learn to be a father because we cannot put all the Chinese culture of parenting on ourselves to raise the kids. So as Chinese parents in Canada, we need to learn continuously to pick up some good things in raising our child.'

Immigration: Opportunities for and barriers to fatherhood

Many Canadian participants in the study shared their enthusiasm for the resources available to them in Canada. They described amenities such as parks and playgrounds as instrumental in facilitating interaction between the fathers and their children:

> 'The thing I like here is that there are so many things I can do with my children . . . hiking, swimming, and skating.' (Father from the former Yugoslavia)

Most of the fathers in the study spoke of the opportunities that living in Canada will provide their children, particularly concerning education. There seemed to be optimism within most of the participants that their children will have a better life in Canada than they are currently experiencing. The following quote from a Latin American parent is quite representative in its mix of hope and optimism:

> 'It's a very new experience for us . . . There are things we like about this Canadian society. We still think this is the best choice for our son. That he can have better opportunities as an adult in this society. So I think the educational system is very good here. And I have to say the same situation that we are both working and working different shifts during the day has obligated us to organize us better as parents and take serious responsibilities towards the child.'

A strong theme among the Latin American fathers related to the opportunity to live in an atmosphere of safety and security. This was the only group that highlighted this aspect of life in Canada.

A final opportunity that Canada has provided to fathers that was mentioned in several of the interviews was the opportunity to learn about parenting and child development. This theme arose primarily within the Latin American and Chinese fathers. 'Canada offers good information and advice on how to parent children in the best way' (Latin American father).

While the Ethiopian fathers in Israel described the impact of immigration on their fatherhood role as mostly negative with some positive elements, the opposite trend was found in the responses of FSU fathers. Most of their discussion was focused on positive effects, with some negative or ambivalent remarks:

> 'Immigration to Israel has affected me positively. I am sure that had I lived in another country I would have reacted differently. My encounter with a different culture helped me review my hypotheses about life. I had my ideas on child socialization, but when they tell me differently here I am willing to consider it, to negotiate, to be more attentive to the views of other people.' (FSU father)

Accordingly, immigration may represent an opportunity in which the immigrant can 're-invent' himself as a man and a father:

> 'In Russia everything is dictated while in Israel children are given the freedom of choice; grow up, do whatever you want as long as you are a good person. The same freedom of choice is given to fathers . . . You have the freedom in your personal growth, in your profession, and in your role as a father.'

Congruent with other studies on immigrants to Canada and Israel, the lack of employment or employment in a job that did not utilize their education and skills seemed to be the biggest barrier to effective fathering. Fathers expressed it in different ways. An Ethiopian father in Israel said:

> 'In Ethiopia the father was the provider. In Israel our provider is "The National Security Institute". I am not working, I do not have a profession. With this small allowance (child allowances) it is impossible to meet my children's needs.'

One Chinese father in Canada spoke of this in terms of not being able to be the man of which his children would be proud. Other fathers spoke of unemployment as a barrier to effective fathering in terms of their inability to realize one of the primary roles of the father – that of the family provider:

> 'Not having the right job that I enjoy is a big influence on me. I have changed so many jobs always trying to find a better financial situation.' (Father from the former Yugoslavia)

Fathers also talked about the impact of underemployment on their status and self-esteem:

> 'In China, I have education, background, the social status . . . So in getting employment I would see myself like proud and (have) confidence . . . Because the son will observe how the father has status in the employment. So in China, I would see myself as more confident and proud of myself . . . But in Canada, with the barrier as my inadequate English . . . it seems that I am not able to achieve the confidence . . . now I am working in restaurant and when my child says what am I doing now, and this will not be a good example for my child then . . .'

According to many of the fathers interviewed, the need to acquire another language upon emigration and the fathers' lack of understanding of the system exacerbated this loss of authority. Some interviewees in Israel attributed the decline in fathers' central authority in the family to the changes in the division of labour in the traditional family that occurred upon emigration:

> 'There are many arguments between husbands and wives, there is a lot of confusion. Two weeks after we arrived in Israel they gave us a lecture regarding equal rights for women. Can you imagine . . . two weeks in the country and they want us to be already equal.' (Ethiopian father)

Other FSU fathers echoed this sentiment, perceiving Israeli society's more egalitarian nature as having a negative impact on fatherhood:

> 'I feel a bit lost in Israel. All those feminist views depress me as a father. Now women have only rights and men are left with all the responsibilities. Women are not taking maternity leave and men are stuck alone with the baby at home. I am conservative. If I fail as a breadwinner and can't provide my wife and children with economic security I will not feel like I am a man.'

Intervention programmes and support systems

Many of the participants in Canada and Israel talked about the lack of support networks for fathers. This was usually in reference to informal family and community networks that shared the responsibilities and tasks of parents. 'Here, in Canada, I find myself having to pay more attention to my children because I do not have other family members to take care of my kids'.

This sense of lack of support was a predominant theme in each group of participants. Unlike Canada where immigrant parents are provided with parenting programmes, and some of the interviewees utilized such programmes, most Israeli fathers reported they had never participated in any intervention programme. Many Ethiopian fathers in Israel who value the educational system reported that they are willing to participate in intervention programmes, particularly those related to school: 'When the school invites me I usually come, there are kids who do not have parents to protect them at school, to encourage them'. One father conditioned his participation on the prerequisite that programmes must take into account the values and traditions of the Ethiopian community and try to build a bridge between the host culture and that of their country of origin. One father commented, 'You need to consult the community when planning programmes. You cannot continue based on our culture. You need variations of both cultures'. In contrast to Ethiopian fathers, most of the FSU fathers seem to be critical of the Israeli education system and would be reluctant to participate in interventions initiated by schools. In turn, most of the FSU fathers indicated that they mainly sought help from medical professionals and experts. FSU fathers expressed interest in programmes that provide information on child development and guidance, programmes that include experts, programmes adapted to fathers' work hours, programmes that enable meetings with other fathers, and programmes that allow intimacy and closeness with children. Interestingly, they also wished for programmes that support empowering images of fatherhood. Since immigrants in both groups studied in Israel felt their image was threatened by unemployment, language deficiencies and feminism, they expect intervention programmes to help them gain their status and control. One FSU father expressed how he would participate in a programme that reinforced the importance of the role that fathers play in their families:

> 'I would have liked women to join programs that are for fathers and children in order to re-discover their husbands as fathers. Women should trust their husbands, discover their attitudes regarding their fatherhood, and realize how important this role is for us. Unfortunately it happens a lot that you do not know what the father is thinking until you ask him. A mother carries the load until she feels she cannot do it all by herself and then we come into the picture. This must be changed, fathers have to be empowered in their position.'

Similar to the Ethiopian fathers, FSU fathers in Israel expressed reservations about what they perceived to be the paternalistic attitudes of intervention programmes and coordinators of these programmes.

DISCUSSION

The domains of fatherhood research described in the introduction outlined three core concerns: namely, the issues of fathers' presence and fathers' involvement, and the meaning and definition of fatherhood. The above findings relate to all three areas: fathers in the study were found to be highly present, involved, motivated, and seeking positive and creative ways to express their roles as fathers in a new country. Cultural variations were found in the role definitions and in the meaning ascribed to fatherhood, as well as in the perceived impact of immigration, suggesting that the meaning assigned to fatherhood is socially and culturally constructed. Similarities were found in that fathers from all groups saw their primary role as that of breadwinner and took responsibility for the overall well-being of the family. The fathers interviewed seemed to be highly committed to raising their children and playing a significant role in their lives. Many were equally eager to help their children maintain cultural continuity. They even shared similar perceptions regarding the 'drawbacks' of Canadian and Israeli fatherhood, in that they felt fathers in their host country fail to impart values of respect and consideration towards authority and adults. Some openly questioned the Western notion of gender equality. Participants acknowledge the cultural change in immigration to Western countries as effecting their increased involvement in direct childcare responsibilities, educational supervision, and recreational and outdoor activities.

On a conceptual level, we found a high level of paternal presence and involvement with the 54 fathers interviewed, regardless of age, culture and socio-economic status. Although some of the findings outline high levels of difficulty and concern, there is no evidence to support an all-inclusive immigration 'deficit' theory of fathers. The data challenge the pathological comprehension of immigration as a mere source of risk for fathers and families. The study shows that immigration may seriously challenge the father's role. Unemployment and lack of language are the main barriers for immigrant fathers and are seen as a threat imposed upon the traditional role of a father as breadwinner and head of the family in all the cultures. On the other hand, the new situation may provide the opportunity to attach new meanings to traditional roles and to reinterpret previous definitions of fatherhood in order to embrace new cultural norms. Among these fathers, we could see no acute risk of disengagement. Rather, we saw a group of fathers from six different cultures, which are positively engaged with their children as they face the struggles of adaptation, language acquisition and employment. Therefore, we suggest that immigration may be better understood in family studies as a set of barriers and opportunities to exercise parental roles in the new country. The study also indicates the need for a more positive view of immigrant fathers based on their strengths and motivation. Based on the above findings we call for utilizing a more complex model of immigration and fatherhood that takes into consideration ecological factors both in the host culture and in the culture of origin that serve as barriers and opportunities for fathers in exercising their role in the new country. An example of the interplay between contextual factors and fathers' adaptation is the different perception of immigration held by Ethiopian and FSU fathers. Both groups experience immigration as a major transformation in their lives as men and fathers. Yet Russian fathers seem to interpret those changes in terms of personal and family growth and understand immigration as an opportunity to expand and enrich their role conception. Ethiopian fathers, on the other hand, view immigration as posing a rigorous test of fatherhood jeopardizing their abilities to fulfil fathering roles. Such differences can be related to the ecological differences both in the fathers' countries of origin and in the host country. Differences in formal education and previous professional training of these two groups may partially contribute to the successful incorporation of FSU immigrants to the labour market, while most Ethiopian immigrants struggled with high levels of unemployment and minimal wage labour opportunities. Systemic barriers such as racism and discrimination that Ethiopian fathers encountered in the host country precipitated the devaluation of the paternal figure. These expressions seriously harmed another traditional role of the Ethiopian fathers. They challenged the historical role of the Ethiopian fathers as responsible for preserving the honour and pride of the Ethiopian family and community. Excluded by the system and offended by racism, the loss of stature of the father figure was inevitable.

Immigration research has questioned the salience of cultural contributions to the change in family roles (Hernandez & McGoldrick 1999). The findings in this study suggest directions of both cultural continuity and change in immigrant fathers' images of fatherhood. These fathers demonstrated a tendency to retain valuable aspects of fatherhood conceptions from their countries of origin and to adopt and incorporate new elements from the new country. This process of examination and re-accommodation of parenting may be related to the degree of criticism or identification that a group holds towards the cultural images of fatherhood in a new country and in their country of origin, to the positive or negative impact of immigration on fathers themselves, and to the degree of similarity or cultural distance perceived between images of fatherhood in the host country and in the country of origin.

Implications for practice

The fathers' views shed new light on planning, housing and implementing interventions for immigrant fathers. In Israel and Canada, like other Western countries, interventions geared towards immigrants in the welfare and educational system are usually directed at children (e.g. language acquisition programmes) and mothers (e.g. reproductive health literacy), while few are directed at immigrant fathers. Most of the fathers expressed a desire/need to participate in programmes related to their children. While Canadian fathers were provided with such opportunities, Israeli fathers were rarely invited to participate in community or school-based or any other type of intervention. Based on fathers' responses the authors had prepared training manuals for interventions with fathers (Shimoni *et al*. 2000) and initiated training of programme directors. Fathers expressed hope for programmes to be less paternalistic and a desire for interventions to be designed with input from programme participants, with programmes utilizing participants'

cultural terminology and cultural preferences. Ethiopian fathers, in particular, asked for programmes that would help bridge former and new conceptions of fatherhood. The knowledge gained from this study can perhaps enhance the level of cultural sensitivity by providing a framework for understanding the coping mechanisms that fathers may utilize in adapting to a new culture. None of the interviews contained an expression of need for psychological interventions at the individual or even family level. This trend may be explained by the lack of traditions of psychological and social work interventions in the cultures of origin. This finding points to a possible discrepancy in the definition of helping professions in the home and host countries and may account for a lack of utilization of services not familiar to the immigrant.

While all groups viewed the educational system as the primary venue for promoting a child's success in the new country, they differed in their degree of confidence in their ability to provide their children with the necessary skills for success in the new society. For example, the FSU fathers were more confident that their offspring would integrate into mainstream Israeli society, while the Ethiopian fathers expressed their doubts that this would occur and regarded educational interventions as a source of possible help to them and their children in that respect. Fathers' feelings about their children's likelihood to assimilate into mainstream society should be central to interventions and further research on immigrant fathers. Listening to parental voices could assist in planning and housing interventions. Consideration of the eco-context of the culture of origin may aid in identifying culturally compatible venues to support these families. FSU fathers in this study, similarly to their traditional pattern of seeking help from experts, favoured being approached by specialists, preferably from the field of medicine. However, Ethiopian fathers seemed to prefer school-based programmes regarding educational success as essential for their children's future integration. Another example of the contribution of fathers' voices for planning and housing interventions comes from a current study conducted in the USA, where similar methodology was used to document perceptions of Korean fathers, mothers, and grandparents (Roer-Strier & Kinavey, in preparation). It was found that although education was seen as the main venue for Korean children in the USA, Korean fathers recommended that family- and parenthood-related interventions would be provided by the church. The Korean churches were found to function both as an institute of preservation of community coherence and as facilitators of adaptation to the host culture.

The findings further highlight the importance of social policies that assist immigrant fathers. Immigrant fathers' roles must be taken into account, mainly during periods of unemployment. For groups such as Ethiopian fathers, for whom breadwinning is such an important element of a successful image of fatherhood, unemployment, second-language skills, and isolation are detrimental to self-confidence and self-esteem. The most important services that can be provided to immigrant fathers are intense support for learning the host culture's language and any other strategies for enhancing their chances for suitable employment.

In recent years, some human service agencies have recognized the need to provide specific programmes for immigrant and refugee men to enhance their parental roles. The Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, located in Calgary, Alberta, is an example of an organization that has invested resources in this area. Most of the programmes are offered through the Mosaic Family Resource Centre.

The Mosaic Centre offers a holistic, comprehensive, collaborative programme to promote the health, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of high-risk immigrant and refugee families through prenatal, postpartum, and early childhood phases. The Centre helps children, parents, and grandparents from more than 26 different immigrant and refugee communities. Through consumer, interdisciplinary, and interagency/intersectoral collaboration, the comprehensive multicomponent programme provides education and social support, as well as prevention and intervention activities, in a culturally sensitive environment with first-language support.

In relation to immigrant and refugee men who are fathers, the primary programme at the Mosaic Centre is the Integrated Fathers and Children Participatory Project. This programme addresses the specific needs of immigrant fathers of male caregivers with children aged 3–5. The specific target population are multi-barriered men and their children who are experiencing poverty, underemployment/employment issues, attachment and health issues, trauma, language barriers, cultural isolation and other challenges related to integration into Canadian society. The programme offers learning activities for fathers and children together with age-appropriate activities to help prepare them for school.

Two other programmes provide opportunities for fathers to contribute to the development of their

children. The Family Literacy Program allows immigrant/refugee parents to participate in literacy activities that will improve children's language and support their learning. The second programme, the Multicultural Family and Child Training Program, is for immigrants and refugee families from underserved communities who are experiencing difficulties in Canadian society. Through a play-based learning programme, children are prepared for success in school through social and skill development.

Social services, social policies, and intervention programmes must address institutionalized racism, as well as other risk factors. This study shows the importance of listening to fathers' voices in planning and implementing non-paternalistic, participative interventions, culturally tailored to the unique needs, perceptions, and cultural preferences of different immigrant groups.

Directions for further research

This study used a small sample of immigrant fathers without a non-immigrant comparison group and cannot be generalized to a wide population. Therefore we suggest that national quantitative surveys based on the themes that were discovered in the two countries could further delineate and assess more accurately needs of immigrant groups. In addition, these fathers showed high respect to authority figures and some of the findings may be related to social desirability (e.g. high level of willingness to participate in intervention programmes).

As racism was one of the emerging themes in this research, the findings support the case for further research on its impact on immigrant fathers. We also believe that inclusion of wives, children, and grandparents' perceptions triangulated with those of the fathers could lead to a better understanding of fatherhood in the context of cultural change.

Comparing fathers' perceptions in countries with different immigration policies can benefit our understanding of fathers' views and insights in light of macro-systems of the ecological contexts.

Greenfield (1994) called for the construction of a methodological paradigm for studying minority and immigrant families that aims to study participants' perceptions and attributions of meaning to the studied phenomena. This qualitative study proposes such an alternative paradigm that may aid similar studies addressing the perceptions and assessing the needs of families of different immigrant groups. By giving voice to the families, this methodology facilitates documenting parental expectations, as well as their recommendations for interventions. It also helps us to assess the challenges and barriers parents perceive. In addition, the examination of cultural contexts both in the country of origin and in the host culture may help in analysing and deconstructing the meaning of the changing parental discourse.

We are currently involved in studies in Europe, Canada, and the USA utilizing the above method. While adaptations of the questionnaire to different groups were found to be essential, we learned that the qualitative methodology described here could potentially aid both practitioners and social services in multicultural countries in understanding and serving families in cultural transitions.

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